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IS MARK TWAIN DEAD?

BY EUGENE H. ANGERT.

MARK TWAIN is dead. Not dead in any literary sense, but literally dead; dead as Aristophanes, as Bunyan, as George Washington, just plain dead. I know this statement will be met with incredulity, perhaps with derision. But, after the proof which I have to offer, no unbiased mind can doubt its truth. The conviction that Mark Twain is no longer alive first flashed upon me, as I read his latest alleged work, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" I at once began an exhaustive investigation. Conjecture gradually grew into certainty, and after the evidence had been accumulated all doubt was gone. I became absolutely certain that Mark Twain was dead. I know this statement will be dismissed by those readers, who resent any disturbance of their too readily accepted beliefs, as the vagary of a crack-brained theorist, if, indeed, they do not ascribe it to a more acute form of mental instability. But should the fear of ridicule compel my silence? Did I not owe to Mark Twain's readers of a century or two hence the moral obligation of publishing my discovery? Ought not future generations be saved from the endless argument, the crimination and recrimination of learned commentators, that surely would convulse the literary world when the authenticity of Mark Twain's later writings was questioned? Should not posterity be spared the phalanx of Twainian critics, whose lives given over to the minutiae of investigation, might be more profitably employed, and the countless volumes that would be written, and perhaps read, to establish one side or another of the controversy? For, of course, the question, so thoughtlessly ignored by the readers of to-day, whether Mark Twain was the author of his works, would undoubtedly be raised by the literary dilettanti of a hundred years from now. How much better that it should be raised and

settled in this day and generation! What interminable literary strife, and how many useless volumes we, and those who come after us, would have been spared had some one, during Lord Bacon's lifetime, confronted him with the fresh evidence of the conspiracy to palm off upon the guileless actor, William Shakespeare, the plays and poems which Bacon had himself written and was ashamed to father! If any contemporary of Shakespeare had merely mentioned the deception that must have been known to many, how quickly it would have been ended and the true authorship of Bacon's plays revealed! For if we, out of our great ignorance of Shakespeare's life, are able to establish that he was not the author of his purported plays, how conclusively it could have been demonstrated by one who associated with Shakespeare and knew all about him! And had we been spared the all-absorbing problem of the authorship of Shakespeare's works, which, like Banquo's ghost, will not down, we might now find time to read the plays themselves. No; the indifference of the contemporaries of Shakespeare and Bacon to the great literary deception of their day shall not be imitated by me. The mystery of Mark Twain's writings shall not be left for some learned Ignatius Donnelly or Nathaniel Holmes of a century from now to unravel. The blunderbuss loaded for his destruction shall be fired now, not a couple of hundred years after his death. The evidence of the conspiracy shall be given to the public while it is still fresh and unquestionable.

So indisputable does it appear to me that Mark Twain has been dead for some years that I marvel the public should so long have been deceived. Strange that of all the readers of his latest alleged work, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" I alone have dismissed that academic question for the obvious and more important inquiry it suggested, *Is Mark Twain Dead?*

Let me briefly state the facts as I have gathered them, and then with such particularity as the limits of this article will permit the evidence upon which they rest. Mark Twain died in the year 1906. The exact date and place of his demise I have been unable as yet to discover. But it is undoubtedly true that he passed away during the summer or early fall of that year in an obscure village of Switzerland. For the reading world he has continued to live. Pseudo-humorous writings, in feeble imitation of those which have made him the first of laugh-provokers, have

been given to the eager public after the Almighty had silenced the tongue of the teller of tales, and forever deprived the world of the brilliant mind which gave us "Tom Sawyer," "Huckleberry Finn" and "Colonel Mulberry Sellers." In all history no greater literary hoax than this has been perpetrated. The Shakespeare delusion, the Ireland forgeries, the mystery of Junius, the Fiona MacLeod myth, are insignificant deceptions compared with that which is being carried on at the present time by the use of the name of Mark Twain. Of course there is a motive for this fraud, and it is a very obvious one. For many years prior to his death Mark Twain commanded the largest audience of any writer of his day. Not only in America, but throughout Europe, his new books were awaited with as much eagerness as an instalment of a Dickens novel seventy years ago. Not even Kipling or Roosevelt, in the zenith of their literary careers, could so readily mint their words into golden coin. The financial return to his publishers was enormous. But they foresaw that the steady stream of wealth that flowed from Mark's genius must cease at his death. The inexhaustible mine must close when he was no more. The old levels might be worked over, but no new veins of virgin gold could be unearthed and marketed. Mark Twain's passing of the Biblical tenure of threescore-and-ten warned the publishers that this financial catastrophe could not be averted much longer. Then it was that the possibility of keeping him alive indefinitely flashed upon them. If his death, when it occurred, could be kept secret, books written by the publishers' hacks might be given to the gullible public year after year as the latest offerings of Mark Twain. And the mine would, indeed, prove inexhaustible! So with every contingency carefully provided for, it was not difficult, after Mark Twain had quietly passed away, to continue his existence. The fact that his death occurred in an obscure European village made it easy to suppress. As his last years had been spent abroad he was an unfamiliar figure to his own countrymen, and so detection of the imposture was unlikely. An impostor had, of course, to be provided, but the impersonation was much easier than that of the Prince of Zenda, so successfully carried on by Rudolph Rassendyll in the novels of Anthony Hope. Oscar Wilde, in that delightfully truthful essay on "The Decay of Lying," has shown that nature imitates art and that life patterns itself after fiction. And so

probably it was the late Edward Everett Hale's story of "My Double and How He Undid Me" that suggested to the conspirators the idea of providing a double for Mark Twain to continue his life after he had laid it down. But whether this be a fact or only a theory, the double was provided and continues to act his part. As often as seems advisable to avoid any suspicion of Mark Twain's death, no oftener, he parades himself in public. These sallies into the limelight are confined to audiences of college girls, to whom the person of the real Mark Twain is about as well known as that of Napoleon. But while his public appearances are infrequent, books and magazine articles that bear the name of Mark Twain are brought forth with rapidly recurring regularity. The conspiracy has succeeded. The public has accepted the counterfeit works as genuine. No pure-food law protects the gullible reader from mislabelled literary pabulum, and the reputation of Mark Twain has been burdened with a mass of serious and solemn writing whose weight even it can scarcely sustain. I can only hope by this exposure to relieve that sacred reputation from additional sorry burdens.

The limits of this article prevent me from mentioning all of the evidence upon which these statements rest, but I shall offer sufficient to convince any fair-minded reader of their truth. Mark Twain's latest works have been copyrighted in the name of the Mark Twain Company. This fact has been widely commented upon by reviewers, but they have seen in it only subject for jest. It possesses a more important significance. The creation of this corporation is a convincing proof that Mark Twain is no longer alive. For what possible pretext can there be for a living author incorporating himself? From the earliest day, when "our father Adam sat him down and scratched with a stick in the mould," down to the latest moment of time, when the maiden effort of the youngest scribe is struggling into print, we search in vain for an instance of a living author turning himself into a corporation. There is no record of any Homeric Consolidated Epic Company, although it has been shown that Homer was a syndicate. No corporate charter was taken out by Dumas, although Dumas was an underwriter of other men's works. We do not find any articles of association filed by the Shakespeare-Bacon-Marlowe Universal Classic Company. Even Andrew Lang, an underwriter of the first magnitude and a most active literary

syndicate, has so far denied himself the luxury of incorporating. Every author, ancient or modern, great or small, has cast his work upon the troubled waters of public opinion unprotected by the buoy of a corporate copyright. Surely if there were some reason for this unusual course other authors, equally jealous of fame and fortune, would have turned themselves into corporations. There is, there could be, no reason for incorporating a live Mark Twain; but there was the strongest motive for incorporating the dead Mark Twain. In no other way could the conspirators obtain a valid copyright of the works they published in his name. For, their copyright in Mark Twain's name would be invalid if it was discovered that the author was dead when he applied for it; on the other hand, the discovery of the fraud would not affect the validity of any copyright granted to the Mark Twain Company.

I find strong corroborative evidence that Mark Twain is dead in the articles of incorporation themselves. The Mark Twain Company purports to be a corporation created by Mark Twain for his sole and separate use. Certainly we would expect him to be present at its birth. He would unquestionably be a party to the incorporation of himself. It was hardly the sort of thing to leave to strangers. If his name is not signed to the articles of incorporation as one of the organizers the conclusion is inevitable that it was impossible to obtain his signature. For such impossibility there could be but one reason—he had passed into that shadowy realm from which, in the present state of mediumistic advancement, the only signature he could furnish would be on a slate. Accordingly I turned my attention to the Mark Twain Company and found that it was a corporation chartered by the State of New York on December 28th, 1908. I examined the original articles in the Secretary of State's office and made the startling discovery that *Mark Twain was not one of the organizers of the Mark Twain Company*. His signature does not appear to the agreement which constituted him a corporation. The articles are signed and acknowledged before a Notary Public by three individuals, residents of the City of New York, whose names are unknown to fame. This fact the reader can verify by referring to the corporation records of the State of New York. I maintain, therefore, that the absence of Mark Twain's signature from the papers incorporating him, if not conclusively establish-

ing his death, at least shifts the burden of proof upon those contending that he is alive.

About five years ago Mark Twain announced that he was writing his autobiography which would not be published until one hundred years after his death. This latter statement was so frequently and so emphatically made by the author that it will be readily recalled. Mark Twain was a truthful man; he would not resort to a gross deception for the purpose of advertising a forthcoming book. We can safely assume that he would never permit the autobiography to be given to the public during his lifetime. But about two years ago the first instalment of this very work appeared in a magazine and further instalments followed for over a year. What more conclusive evidence could there be that Mark Twain is dead? He always kept faith with the public, and if we believe him alive at the time the autobiography was published we must hold him guilty of deception and trickery. And to his thousands of friends and admirers, who were so deeply pained at the premature publication of the autobiography, my discovery of his death prior to its appearance will come as glad tidings and welcome relief.

I have already made some reference to the freedom from suspicion with which the public accepts the impersonator for Mark Twain himself; and yet, even a superficial view ought to show plainly that he is an impostor. Of late years there have been frequent charges, all unsubstantiated it is true, but nevertheless widely circulated, that Mrs. Eddy's life is being lived by a clever substitute. I incline to the belief that this claim was concocted by the conspirators to divert attention from the actual impersonation of Mark Twain which they were carrying on. If it is the old cry of "Stop Thief," it is not the first time that ruse has proven successful. The personality of the present Mark Twain convinces any thoughtful man that he is bogus. True, he possesses certain physical resemblances to the Mark Twain we knew—notably the long, bushy, white hair. But the resemblance does not extend beyond the physical appearance. The old Mark Twain was profoundly profane; the new Mark Twain uses language that requires no expurgation for Sunday-school purposes. The old Mark Twain was notoriously indifferent about his dress; the new Mark Twain is a Beau Brummel, who, with his white suits, even to evening dress, is the acknowledged leader of

fashion. The old Mark Twain expressed himself in all of his writings in terms of the river craft; the new Mark Twain uses the language of the drawing-room, not of the steamboat deck. The old Mark Twain hobnobbed with river men and luckless Western miners; the new Mark Twain is the boon companion of captains of finance and millionaires are his playfellows. Is further illustration necessary to show that this person, whoever he may be, is not the Mark Twain we have known for fifty years?

But I attach little importance, after all, to the personality of the man; my most conclusive evidence that Mark Twain is no more I find in the books that bear his name. "By their fruits ye shall know them." If the dead can do no wrong, likewise can they write no books. Since 1906 two books by Mark Twain have appeared—"Christian Science" and "Is Shakespeare Dead?" Even with his name on the title-page, it must have taxed the credulity of the most unsuspecting to accept Mark Twain as the author of these works. Instead of the fanciful stories or delightfully humorous travesties that Mark Twain produced during his forty years of writing, we have here a ponderous theological argument and a profound study of the Baconian controversy. If the long series of Gilbert's comic operas had been followed, in his declining years, by the publication, under his name, of a treatise on Hindu philosophy, would we not have rightly doubted the asserted authorship and felt certain that the publisher was perpetrating a joke? But not only the subject-matter of the later Mark Twain books, but their style, give the lie to their alleged authorship. We look in vain for the delicious humor, the unexpected play of imagination, with which his authentic works abound. The forced funny story, the occasional humorous remark, so evidently dragged in by the heels, indicate an obvious imitation rather than the genuineness of Mark Twain's authorship.

Of "Christian Science," I need only say that it is a learned and weighty discussion of Mrs. Eddy's favorite religion. Convincing, scientific, profoundly learned, I admit; written by the author of "Huckleberry Finn," never! I doubt whether Mark Twain could have written "Christian Science" if he had wanted to; that he would not have wanted to I am sure.

But the most convincing proof is found in the latest book bearing his name, "Is Shakespeare Dead?" which appeared in

April of this year. Emboldened by their success and no longer fearful of detection, the publishers have exhibited the extreme of recklessness in putting Mark Twain's name to this work. The author sought to lend some probability to this claim by sprinkling throughout the book an air of forced facetiousness, and inserting in its pages inappropriate allusions to Mark Twain's early life in Missouri and on the Mississippi River. This work could never have been written by the Mark Twain that we knew. Perhaps his famous remark, that Shakespeare's works were not written by Shakespeare, but by another gentleman of the same name, might be equally true of this book. But the author of "Tom Sawyer" is not the author of "Is Shakespeare Dead?" It is a scholarly work of profound erudition, and has been accepted by critics as the final word on the Baconian controversy. No Shakespearite after reading it can longer cling to the Stratford fallacy. The author reasons logically that the writer of the plays could not have been Shakespeare, because they exhibit an intimate knowledge of the technicalities of the law, and there is no evidence that Shakespeare, the actor, had at any time the leisure to acquire legal lore. Now, in like manner, I contend that the author of "Is Shakespeare Dead?" was the greatest Shakespearian student that ever lived. Nothing but a lifetime of study could have given such complete mastery over the subject. The author displays greater knowledge of his subject than such scholars as Dowden and Furness, who have devoted their lives to the study of Shakespeare. Do the known facts about Mark Twain's life give any evidence that he could have been this profound Shakespearian scholar? On the contrary, they make it positive that he was not. We know that Mark Twain acquired little learning and less literature in the few years he attended school. We know that he spent the early years of his life busily occupied in ways that left no time for soaring to the topmost heights of scholarship; that he was a river pilot and a printer, a gold miner and a reporter on Western papers. We know that in his later years his whole time was given to writing humorous books and making after-dinner speeches; that his final years were spent in travelling abroad, writing more books and making more after-dinner speeches. Truly, a busy life with little time for acquiring extensive learning, and I challenge any who disagree with me to point to a single period of that active life when leisure could

have been found to acquire the erudition so profoundly displayed in this work on Shakespeare. Judged by the known facts of his life, not by what we might assume they might have been—Mark Twain could not have written "Is Shakespeare Dead?" We can more easily believe that the unlettered son of a Stratford butcher wrote the plays that bear the name of Shakespeare than that the uneducated Mississippi River pilot could have acquired the intimate knowledge of the Baconian question displayed in that work.

Another argument successfully used by Baconians is suggested by the same work. In "Is Shakespeare Dead?" Macaulay's "Essay on Bacon" is so frequently quoted that we may assume that it was well known to the writer. I have examined all available data concerning Mark Twain, from the autobiography itself to the merest magazine reference, and I find no indication that he ever read or even knew of Macaulay's Essay. In the absence of any affirmative statement anywhere to that effect, we may properly conclude that he had not read it. It follows then that Mark Twain could not have been the author of "Is Shakespeare Dead?"

If not Mark Twain, then who is the author? the curious will doubtless ask. Just as some anti-Shakespearians are satisfied when they convince us that Shakespeare was not the author of the plays and leave the identity of the real author in doubt, so I might content myself with proving that Mark Twain did not write "Christian Science" and "Is Shakespeare Dead?" without attempting to strip the mask from the writer who has borrowed his name. But the identity of the author is so evident that the reader has probably already guessed it. Applying the principles of deductive ratiocination, made popular by Sherlock Holmes, we know that the real author is a writer unhampered by any sense of humor. He combines a mastery of all subjects of human knowledge with a complete understanding of all religions. He possesses the commercial instinct which makes him an author for revenue only. He is willing to write as the dead for the living there is in it. He is an erudite Shakespearian scholar and has read Macaulay's Essay on Bacon. Jealousy of literary honors has made him the arch enemy of Mrs. Eddy. To enumerate these essential attributes is to name the author. Other writers may lay claim to some of the qualifications; he alone possesses

them all. The name springs instinctively to the lips—Elbert Hubbard.

But any lingering doubt of the correctness of the author's identification is dispelled by the existence of a cryptogram in the works themselves. We know now that Lord Bacon, with infinite labor, wove his name in cipher into the plays which he did not care enough about to claim. So I surmised that Elbert Hubbard, prevented by his arrangement with the publishers from acknowledging the Mark Twain books, would profit by Bacon's ingenuity and likewise reveal his authorship to the elect by similar tortuous methods. But with limited leisure for investigation, I was at a loss how to go about the search for the cipher. Fortunately at this time a friend placed in my hands an exhaustive work just published by William Stone Booth entitled "Some Anacrostic Signatures of Francis Bacon" (Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1909). After reading that work, the discovery of the Hubbard cipher became easy. The author (page 38) points out that the proper place to look for a cipher is at some striking page of the book, one that would readily fasten itself in the author's memory. So I took up "Is Shakespeare Dead?" and turned with confidence to page 23. How to find the cipher that existed there was the next problem. Again Mr. Booth came to my rescue, and I learned (page 36) that you may read the desired anacrostic by selecting from the text the necessary letters, reading from right to left on either the terminal, initial or any letters of any words. I elected to read on any letter of the text and was promptly rewarded with the following anacrostic signature of Elbert Hubbard. Here is the passage exactly as it occurs at page 23 of the book in question, except that I have put the anacrostic letters in capitals to facilitate the reading of the cipher:

"And so on and so on. We sEt down five known facts by themseLves on a piece of paper and numBered it 'page 1'; thEn on fifteen hundred other pieces of papeR we set down the 'conjectures,' and 'supposiTions,' and 'maybes,' and 'perHapses,' and 'doubtlesses,' and 'rUmors,' and 'guesses,' and 'probaBilities,' and 'likelihoods,' and 'we Are permitted to thinks,' and 'we are waRranted in believings,' and 'might have beens,' and 'could have beens,' and 'must have beens,' and 'unquestionably,' and 'without a shadow of doubts'—and behold!"

The supercritical may direct attention to the fact that the "Hubard" of this signature is minus one "b," but if Lord

Bacon spelled his name in sixty different ways in Shakespeare's plays, as Mr. Booth has proven, surely Elbert Hubbard may be permitted, for the purpose of his anacrostic signature, to occasionally drop a "b" from his name. Convinced by this great discovery that the author's name was actually revealed by a cipher, I turned my attention to "Christian Science" and by patient investigation discovered many anacrostic signatures in that book also.

I have now demonstrated beyond all possible doubt that Mark Twain is dead, and that Elbert Hubbard is the author of the books that have appeared since his death. Of course my statement will be emphatically denied by the bogus Mark Twain. But such denial should not shake any one's belief in the facts I have proven. Even in a court of law the denials of an interested party are regarded with suspicion. They are never permitted to prevail over the statements of a disinterested witness. I can have no possible self-interest to serve in proclaiming Mark Twain's death; the strongest possible motive, namely, self-preservation as Mark Twain, prompts denial from the impostor. Will any unbiased reader accept the denial of the most interested party in preference to my disinterested statement?

Besides, any such denial, rightly viewed, is in itself proof that Mark Twain is no more. It will be recalled that a few years ago, while the real Mark Twain was living abroad, a rumor of his death was circulated in this country, and when a reporter went to him for a denial he modestly contented himself with saying that the report was slightly exaggerated. No emphatic refutation, no denial supported by an oath! If Mark Twain answered a mere vague rumor of his death with the statement that it was a slight exaggeration, would he, if living to-day, deny the positive statement of his death, supported as it is by incontrovertible proof? At the most, he might express some doubt as to the finality of the evidence and ask for further time to consider it. And so any emphatic denial can come only from an impostor and is proof that Mark Twain is no more. If, however, the bogus Mark Twain meets this exposure by silence, it must be construed as an admission of his guilt. The conclusion, therefore, is the same whether he denies my statement or fails to deny it, *Mark Twain is dead.*

EUGENE H. ANGERT.